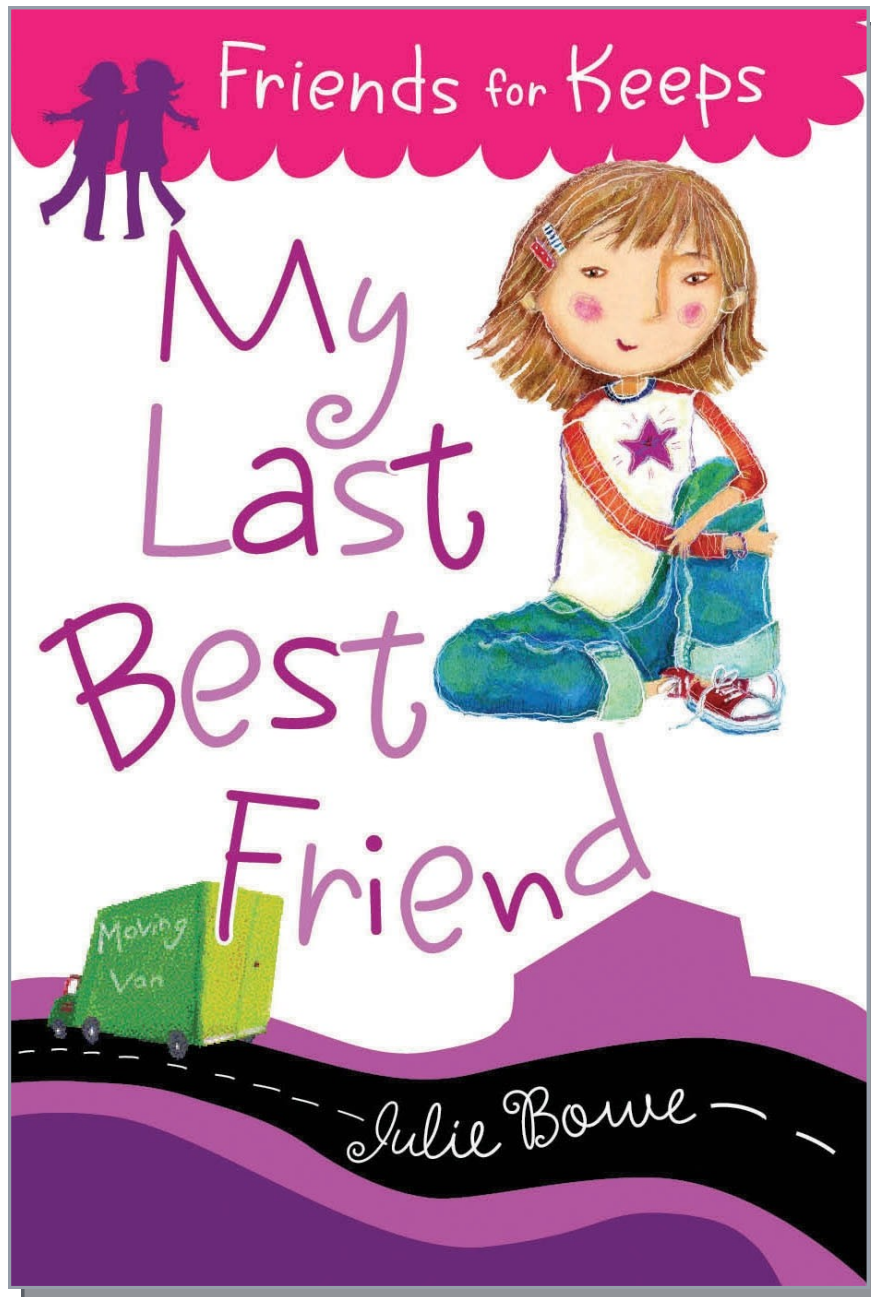


# My Last Best Friend

Teaching Guide



[juliebowe.com](http://juliebowe.com)

# My Last Best Friend

Hello!

Thank you for sharing *My Last Best Friend* with your students. I hope the activities in this guide will help you and your students reflect on Ida's world and further explore your own.

For more information about all the books in my *Friends for Keeps* series, please stop by my website [www.juliebawe.com](http://www.juliebawe.com). I love hearing from young readers. I always write back! 😊

With friendship,

Julie Bawe

## Awards and Honors

- Bank Street College Best Books of the Year
- Barnes & Noble 2010 Summer Reading Program book
- Great Stone Face Book Award finalist
- Kirkus Reviews '07 *Promising Debuts from Important New Voices*
- Paterson Prize for Books for Young People 2008
- Scholastic Book Club selection



Julie Bawe lives in Wisconsin just like Ida May, although she doesn't have a sock monkey as nice as George. She is a full-time author who knows how to strum a guitar, play a really good game of foosball, and count to three in Danish (en, to, tre!).

Julie Bawe is the author of the *Friends for Keeps* series and can be found online at [www.juliebawe.com](http://www.juliebawe.com)

# My Last Best Friend

Language Arts

## About the Book

(From the book jacket)

After her last best friend moves away, Ida May vows to never make another one. Ever. At first, this is a doable plan. Thanks to bratty, bossy Jenna Drews, no one in class has ever really noticed Ida before. But then Stacey Merriweather comes to town. She's friendly and sparkly and popular. Soon she's smiling right at Ida May. And Ida has to force herself not to smile back...

## Themes

Friendship, moving, bullying, divorce, truth-telling

## Discussion Questions

*(Knowledge)*

How would you describe Ida May? Stacey Merriweather? Jenna Drews?

Tell about Ida's town and school.

*(Comprehension)*

What is Ida's main problem at the beginning of the story?

How does Ida deal with her problem?

*(Application)*

What would you like to say to Ida about her friendship situations? *(Friends moving, bullying, making new friends.)*

Have you experienced similar friendship situations in your life? *(Invite volunteers to share their stories.)*

*(Analysis)*

How do Ida's feelings about friendship change during the story?

Why do you think Stacey makes up big stories about her family?

Do you consider Jenna Drews to be a good friend? Explain your answer.

*(Synthesis)*

How would the story be different if Stacey Merriweather hadn't moved to town?

What do you think will happen next for Ida, Stacey, and Jenna?

*(Evaluation)*

What was your favorite part of the book?

If you could choose a character from the book to be your best friend who would it be? Why?

# My Last Best Friend

Science/ Math/ Fine Arts

## Living Sculpture

A topiary is a living sculpture. Plants, bushes, or trees are pruned and trained to grow in geometric shapes or familiar objects. A topiary sculptor requires skills in science, math and art. In the book, *My Last Best Friend*, Ida and Stacey hide secret notes behind a cow-shaped topiary that grows on their school playground.

Fun Facts:

- *Topiary* comes from the Greek word *topos*, meaning *place*.
- Early Romans created topiaries in the shape of animals and mythical creatures.
- In the film, *Edward Scissorhands*, the main character is skilled at topiary.
- One of the largest topiary parks in the world is located in Durbuy, Belgium. More than 250 topiaries grow there.
- In the book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* by J.K. Rowling, the Tri-Wizard Cup is hidden at the center of a living sculpture maze.
- *Green Animals Topiary Garden*, located in Rhode Island, is the oldest topiary garden in the United States.
- Disney parks are home to a variety of topiary figures, including elephants, ostriches, and dinosaurs (see photo).



It's time for a topiary scavenger hunt! Go to Google Images. Search for Green Animals Topiary Gardens. Scroll through the photos. Find the following topiary animals:

Elephant	Duck	Giraffe	Dinosaur
Lion	Bear	Dog	Unicorn

More to explore: <http://topiairesdurbuy.be>      [www.newportmansions.com](http://www.newportmansions.com)      [www.ladewgardens.com](http://www.ladewgardens.com)

## Classroom Topiaries

Materials:

- Cookie cutters or Templates 1-4 (page 10)
- New sponges
- Quick-sprouting seeds (rye, radish, alfalfa)
- Foam plates or shallow pans
- Water
- Pencils
- Scissors
- Water spritzer

Invite your students to grow living sculptures. Trace cookie cutter shapes onto sponges or use Figures 2-5 on Template 1. Cut out the shapes.

Saturate the sponges with water. Arrange on plates or pans. Sprinkle with seeds. Place in a sunny location and keep moist. Observe and chart growth. Prune as desired.

# My Last Best Friend

Creative Writing/ Fine Arts

## What Happens Next?

In *My Last Best Friend*, Ida and Stacey work together to create a fanciful story. Read aloud the following excerpt from their story:

Once upon a time, two girls were lost in the deep, dark forest. They walked for hours until they came to a little lake that was shaped like a spoon. There was a sign posted by the lake with a poem that read:

Spoon of the lake,  
Spoon of the sea,  
Carry me off  
To afternoon tea.

So the girls said the poem together and then stepped onto the lake. They floated across it and they didn't even get wet... (*My Last Best Friend*, page 93)

Invite the students to write their own ending to the story using Template 2. Then have them illustrate their story using Template 3.

# My Last Best Friend

Mathematics

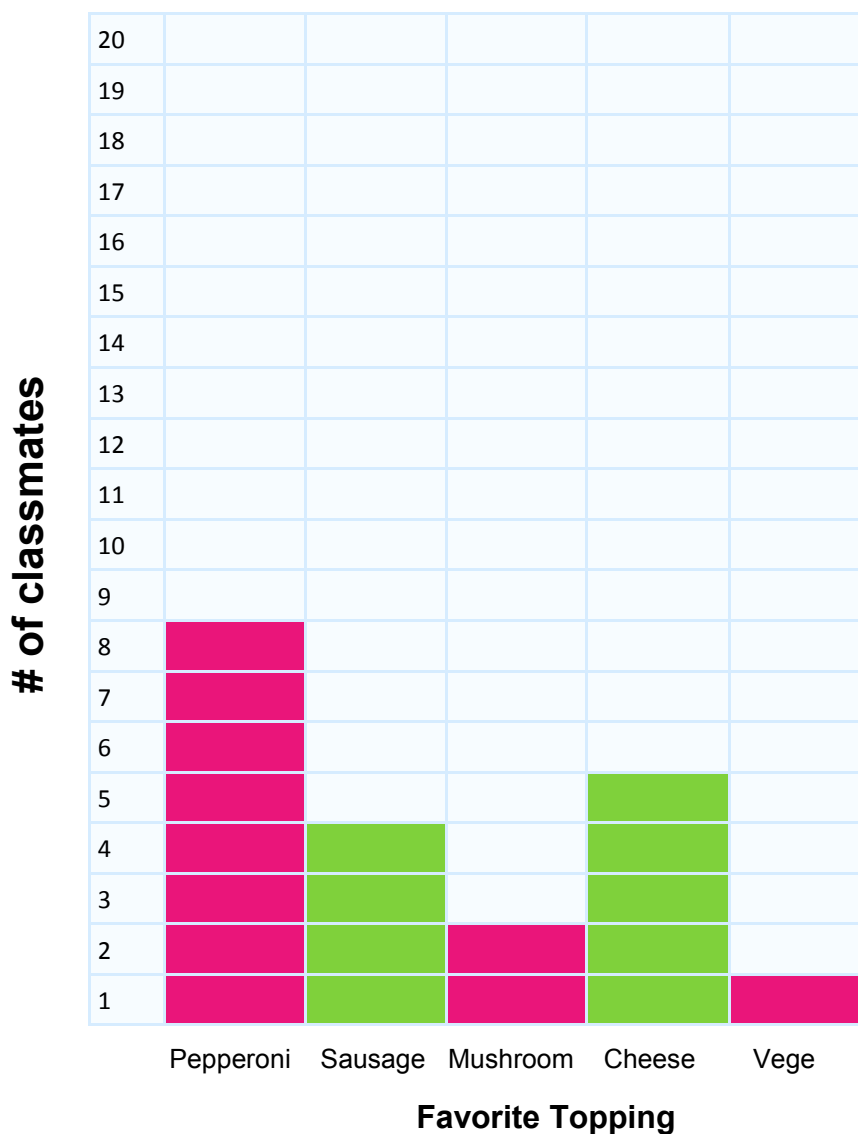
## “My Favorite” Graph

Graphing is a fun way for students to practice math skills and build friendships as they work together to gather information and graph their findings.

Have students form teams. Each team chooses a category of interest, such as sports, books, movies, or musical groups. Team members then gather their classmates' favorite picks within the category. For example, if a team's category is pizza, classmates would be asked to name their favorite toppings.

Teams tally their gathered responses and graph the findings. Here is an example of a completed graph:

**MY FAVORITE: Pizza**



**Extension activity:**  
**My Favorite Character**  
Graph the students favorite characters from My Last Best Friend. Discuss their choices.

# My Last Best Friend

Fine Arts

## Rock Painting

Materials:

- Smooth, clean rocks
- Acrylic paints
- Paint brushes
- Newspaper
- Cups of water (for cleaning brushes)
- Clear sealer



In the book, *My Last Best Friend*, Ida and her friends paint rocks at Jenna's slumber party. Ida chooses a gray rock with a knobby bump. Stacey thinks the rock resembles a humpback whale and, later, paints it to look like one.

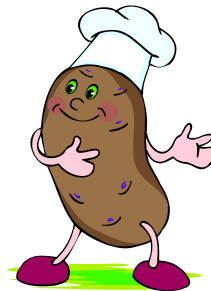
Invite the students to sort through a variety of rocks. As they do, encourage them to name animals or objects that the rocks resemble.

Cover a work surface with newspaper and invite the students to paint the rocks to look like their chosen animal/object. When dry, apply a coat of clear sealer to preserve the students' artwork.

## Potato People

Materials:

- Copies of Figure 1 on Template 1
- Scissors
- Markers and crayons
- Craft materials (ribbon, yarn, sequins, stickers)
- Glue



Ida's fourth grade classmates are preparing for the town's fall festival — *The Purdee Potato Pageant*. Ida, Tom, Rusty, and Randi draw a comical picture of potatoes that look like their classmates. They entitle the picture *A Bushel of Friends*.

Have students cut out copies of Figure 1 to create potato shapes. Invite them to draw facial features on their potato, adding decorative details (hair, clothing) to create self portraits.

Display the potato people in your class area.

# My Last Best Friend

Drama

## Reader's Theatre

### Chapter 15 — *A Bushel of Friends*

**Roles:** Narrators 1, 2 & 3, Mr. Crow, Ida, Rusty, Randi, Tom, Jenna

**Narrator 1:** Mr. Crow's class is getting ready to paint the windows of local businesses to celebrate *The Purdee Potato Pageant*.

**Narrator 2:** Ida, Rusty, Randi and Tom are planning a design for their window.

**Narrator 3:** But they're having trouble coming up with a good design.

**Mr. Crow** (*speaking to the whole class*): It's time to finalize your plans for the Potato Pageant windows. We'll paint them the day after tomorrow.

*Ida, Rusty, Randi and Tom look blankly at each other.*

**Ida:** Any ideas?

**Rusty** (*scratching his head*): Nope. My brain is fried.

**Randi** (*snickering*): French fried?

**Tom** (*pointing at Rusty's red hair*): With ketchup on top!

**Rusty** (*frowning dramatically at Tom*): Knock it off or I'll *mash* you!

**Tom** (*grinning*): Like I'm afraid of a potato brain.

**Rusty** (*pretending to be angry with Tom*): You asked for it!

*Rusty grabs Tom in a friendly headlock.*

**Narrator 1:** Tom howls!

*Pause while Tom howls.*

**Narrator 2:** Randi looks at the boys and snorts.

*Pause while Randi snorts.*



## (Reader's Theatre Continued)

**Narrator 3:** Ida looks at Tom, Rusty and Randi and giggles.

*Pause while Ida giggles.*

**Jenna** (*yelling at Ida, Rusty, Randi and Tom*): Keep it down! You sound like a bunch of babies!

**Ida** (*cleverly*): Not *babies*. Tater Tots.

**Mr. Crow:** Finish up, please!

**Tom:** You think of a design, Ida. You're the best artist.

**Ida** (*surprised*): I am?

*Tom, Rusty and Randi nod in agreement.*

**Narrator 1:** Ida looks around the room, thinking...

**Narrator 2:** ...and fidgeting.

**Narrator 3:** She isn't used to being the leader.

**Ida** (*timidly*): We could draw... us.

**Rusty, Tom, and Randi** (*in unison*): Us?

**Ida** (*nodding*): We'll draw a picture of potatoes that look like everyone in our class.

**Rusty** (*jokingly*): Yeah, and we'll call it *A Bushel of Buttheads!*

**Tom:** Not that. Something nicer, like *A Bushel of...*

**Randi:** *Friends?*

**Rusty** (*nodding*): Yeah, that's good. *A Bushel of Friends.*

**Narrator 1:** So Ida, Rusty, Randi and Tom get busy drawing potatoes on their paper.

**Narrator 2:** They make them look like their classmates.

**Narrator 3:** They give them funny names like *Tom Tater*, *Mashed Meeka*, and *Stacey Spud*.

**Narrator 1:** Ida writes *A Bushel of Friends* under the picture. Randi shows it to Mr. Crow.

**Mr. Crow** (*smiling*): Impressive!

# My Last Best Friend

Physical Development & Health/Social Studies

## Friendship Games

Children all over the world enjoy playing games with their friends. Balancing competitive sports with cooperative games fosters friendship and gives each child a chance to feel like a winner.

Invite students to play the following international games. Talk about how each game reflects the culture/region from which it comes. Using elements from each game, challenge the group to invent their own game. How does the new game reflect your unique group/setting? How does it celebrate friendship?

### China

#### **Catch the Dragon's Tail**

Players: Many

Equipment: None

Players form a "dragon" by standing in a single-file line, hands on the shoulders of the player in front of them. The head of the dragon (the first player in line) tries to tag the tail (the last player) without causing the dragon to break apart. When caught, the tail becomes the new head for the next round.

**Variation:** Mark boundaries in an open play area. Form two dragons. Tuck a kerchief (the dragon's tail) in the waistband of the last player in each line. On your signal, the head of each dragon attempts to snatch the tail of the other dragon.

### Nigeria

#### **Gathering Seeds**

Players: 2

Equipment: 20 marbles, pebbles or other small round objects (the seeds)

Players divide the seeds evenly and position themselves a few steps apart. Facing each other, players place their seeds in a row. The first player rolls/tosses a seed toward the other player's row, attempting to strike one of his or her seeds. If successful, the first player retrieves the tossed seed, gathers the struck seed, and takes another turn. If the player misses, the opponent takes the thrown seed and begins a new round. Play continues until one player has gathered all of the other player's seeds.

**Variation:** Form teams. Expand the play area and use a variety of balls for the seeds.

# (Friendship Games Continued)

## England

### **Queenie, Queenie**

Players: Many

Equipment: Ball

One player is "Queenie." Queenie faces away from the group and tosses a ball over his/her shoulder, without looking to see who catches/retrieves it. The player who gets the ball hides it behind his/her back. The other players also place their hands behind their backs, pretending to have the ball. Queenie faces the group as they chant:

*Queenie, Queenie, who's got the ball?*

*Are they short or are they tall?*

*Are they hairy or are they bald?*

*You don't know because you don't have the ball!*

Through a process of elimination, Queenie guesses who has the ball. That player becomes the new Queenie.

**Variation:** All players extend one hand toward Queenie, keeping their other hand hidden. As each line of the poem is chanted, they switch hands. The player with the ball must also switch hands, increasing the challenge of keeping the ball hidden from Queenie.



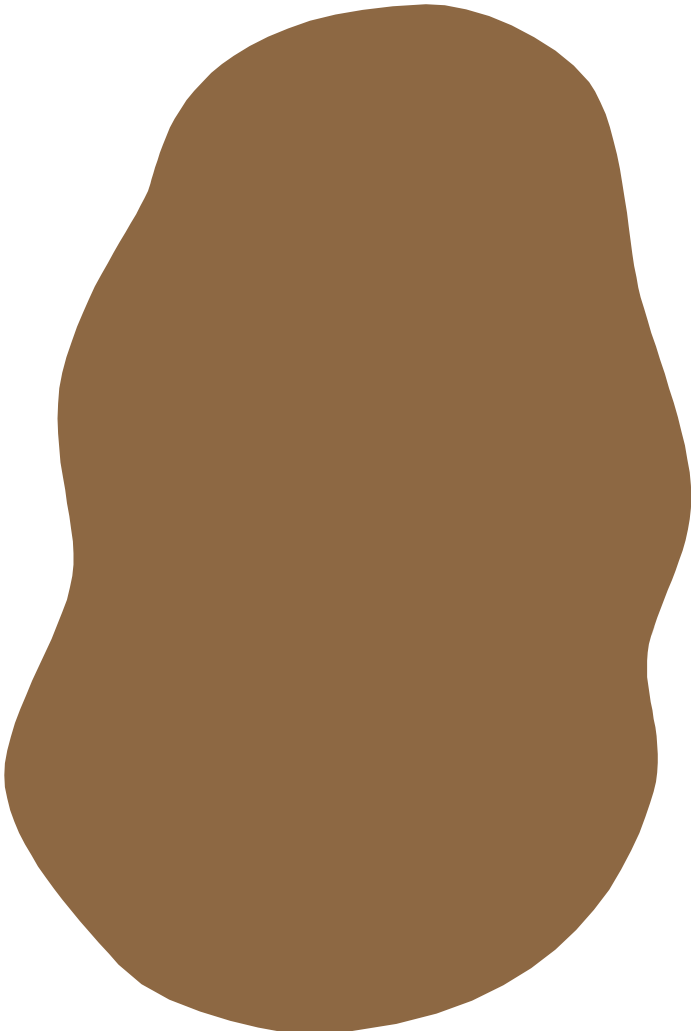


Figure 1

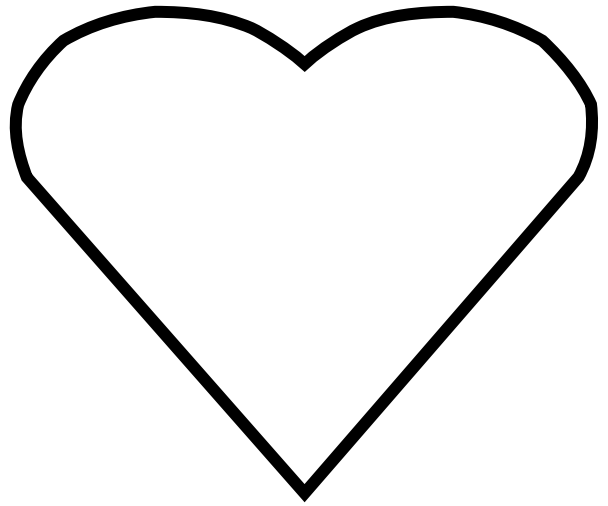


Figure 2

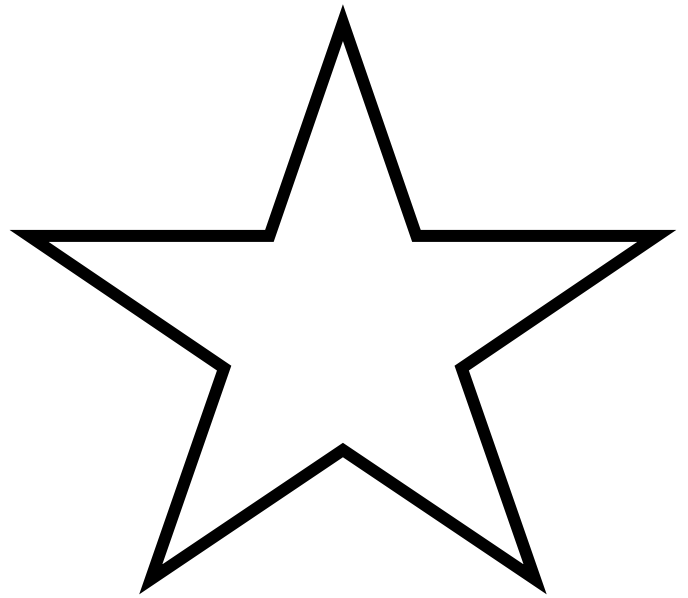


Figure 3

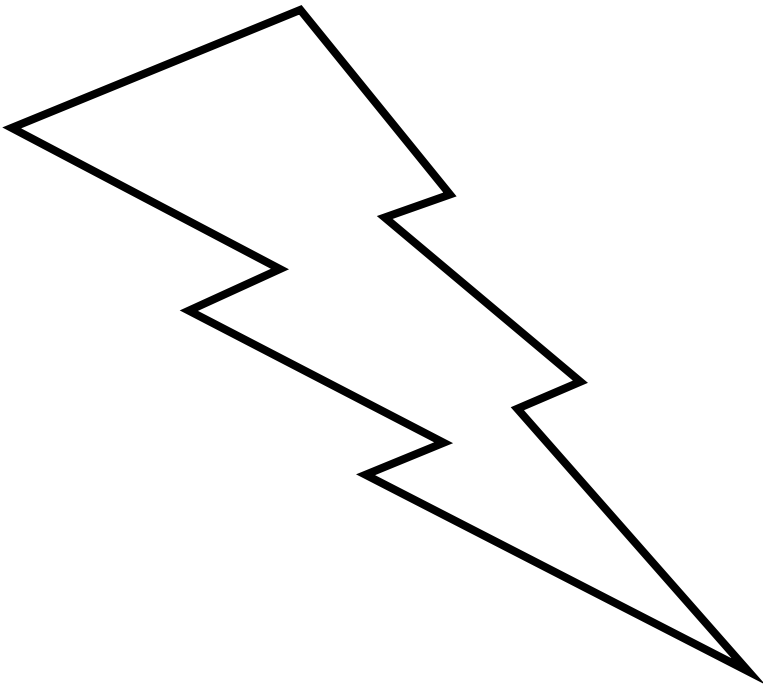


Figure 4

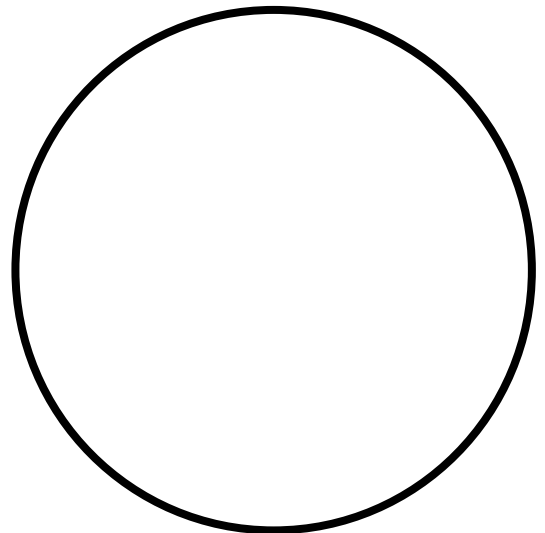


Figure 5



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Draw a picture of your story.

